

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 06577 291643Z

10
ACTION EUR-12

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R 291630Z APR 76
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1213
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: TORIES CHALLENGE GOVERNMENT ON COMMITTEE BAL-
ANCE

REF: LONDON 5424

1. LABOR PARTY'S RIGHT TO MAJORITY ON STANDING COMMITTEES SINCE ITS LOSS OF OVERALL MAJORITY DUE TO DEFECTION OF FORMER LABOR MP JOHN STONEHOUSE (REFTEL) WAS CHALLENGED APRIL 29 BY CONSERVATIVES. TORY MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE ON SELECTION DEMANDED AT LEAST EQUAL REPRESENTATION ON NEW COMMITTEES FOR COMBINED OPPOSITION. PRESS REPORTS CONSERVATIVES SUGGESTED THAT LABOR AND CONSERVATIVE TEES (WHICH HAVE ODD NUMBER OF MEMBERS) BEING SELECTED FROM MINOR PARTIES, WITH LABOR HAVING RIGHT TO NAME THIS MEMBER, BUT THIS ATTEMPT AT COMPROMISE FAILED. COMMITTEE THEN VOTED ALONG PARTY LINES TO STICK WITH CURRENT SYSTEM WHICH ENSURES LABOR MAJORITY ON COMMITTEES (REFTEL).

2. PRESS REPORTS CONSERVATIVES WILL NOW TAKE ISSUE TO FLOOR OF COMMONS IN EFFORT TO END LABOR DOMINATION OF COMMITTEES.

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PAGE 02 LONDON 06577 291643Z

3. COMMENT: THIS DEVELOPMENT WAS ANTICIPATED. COMMITTEE CONTROL, AS WE INDICATED EARLIER, IS VITAL FOR ENACTMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM. WHILE CONSERVATIVES CAN ALMOST CERTAINLY COUNT ON SUPPORT OF MINOR PARTIES (LIBERALS, SNP, PLAID CYMRU AND ULSTER UNIONISTS) WHEN ISSUE COMES TO VOTE IN COMMONS, LABOR EXPECTS TO HAVE BACKING OF SDLP MEMBER AND NI INDEPENDENT WHICH WOULD GIVE GOVERNMENT NARROW MAJORITY AND TURN BACK CHALLENGE. OUTCOME, HOWEVER, MAY ULTIMATELY HINGE ON NUMBER OF ABSENTEES ON EACH SIDE.
ARMSTRONG

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